Elma Udall Biography

The second of six children, Elma Udall was born on Dec. 23, 1917, in St. Johns, Arizona. She attended Flagstaff Teacher’s College and Brigham Young University, eventually graduating from Arizona State University with a degree in social work.

During World War II she signed up for the Red Cross and served in Africa and the Middle East. Following the war and a brief stint with the FBI, she joined the newly formed CIA and worked in London and Helsinki. She later worked for the Department of State in Moscow, Berlin, Stockholm, Vientiane, and Budapest. She ended her career working directly with Ambassador Kingman Brewster at the Court of St. James in London.
JF: This is Tape #57 of the Udall Oral History Project. It’s now February 22, 2004, on Sunday, and we’re at Elma’s house in Albuquerque. Elma, I wondered if you had any chance to think about other things you’d like to say about David and David King, before we move on to other things.

EU: Well, I think I’ve said enough about them. I don’t think of anything special that I need to say.

JF: Okay, I would like to get back where we ended yesterday, which was with some of your earlier memories of your experiences growing up, and your siblings. We talked about Inez and Stewart. You were about five years old when Morris was born in 1922. Do you remember anything about his birth, about the day he was born?

EU: I don’t have any early memories at all, about any of that. I remember moving from that old house into the new one, and he was born shortly after that. It was kind of a difficult time for Mother because her father died at the same time. According to my timeline on my folks, the judge had just been made stake president, and a lot of things like that. But anyway, she was a great mother and the judge was a great father, and we were a happy band. She had taught school, and so by the time we went to school we could write our name and read. We had a piano and she liked to sing, as well as read, in the evening. So we’d stand around the piano when we were little kids, and sing songs with her.

The outdoors was our world. We had friends all over, and we would run all over, it didn’t matter, she didn’t care. We were smart enough to come home for lunch—I mean, to come home—and she didn’t worry about us because there were no problems. Nobody ever locked their house, and you left the car key in the car, so that anybody in the family that needed it, knew where they were. As I say, my older sister had a lot to do with my reading. She read everything, and she’d tell me what was good and what wasn’t—although she was very picky about what she read.

I don’t remember any great moments of playing with Stewart or Morris. I did more with Eloise and Burr because they were a lot younger, and I helped kind of tend them. I’m just saying that the overall atmosphere was good. We went to church all the time, and were active in all those things, as well as in high school.

Anyway, to me, it was a very happy period. I don’t remember any great crises or unhappiness.

JF: I was reading the other day a book by Abe Chanin and his wife. They have two chapters on your family: one on St. Johns and one on your family. In one, Mo related how he and Stewart used to play court, and that they would set up trials and bring in the neighbor kids, and actually try kids who were accused by their siblings of something. Do you remember those?
EU: Oh, heavens yes. It happened in the summer, it was out in our garage. Oh yes, they would organize it. They were great organizers. Dad only had jury trials in the summers, and some summers there weren’t very many cases or anything. He settled most of them before. But we’d been to court. We used to go up and sit and watch it all the time. So they were aware of the procedures and all that. So they’d go out there in the garage. I think I went out and listened a few times. It was kind of a comedy, as well. I mean, there was nothing too serious about it. But I remember one of those kids had stolen 35¢ from his brother, so he got charged, and was guilty. I think the punishment, you had to spend two hours in the chicken coop or something. (laughter)

JF: Were Mo and Stewart sort of equal? I mean, was one usually the judge, and one the prosecutor?

EU: I don’t remember. Dick Greer, whose father was also a lawyer, Dick was a judge later in his life. I think he was the one—I don’t remember whether he stole it, or…. Anyway, he was involved. They weren’t everything. Some of the other kids were in—some of the Gibbons’s, their father was a lawyer. So they played some of the roles.

JF: Now, was that mostly boys? Did the girls play also?

EU: No, it was the boys. One night they were doing it out there with a lamp, and Mother went out to lean against the tree and listen, and bumped into Hazel Greer, who was the mother of the Greers, and she had come by.

JF: And was listening too?

EU: Was listening too. So they both had a good laugh. But law, you know, all that was pretty much front and center with us, with the judge very involved. He would always—he was involved in and interested in so many things, and so for dinner conversation and stuff like that, why, we’d sort of know what was going on.

JF: How about rodeos? He also mentioned that he and Stewart used to set up rodeos.

EU: Well, they followed the seasons. If it was baseball season, they organized baseball games. And if it was—I mean, they had the court, and I don’t know whether it was one summer or two, but here are all these—they’d go down to our corral, and the other kids would bring in a calf, and they would set up—there’s a wonderful piece of paper Stewart did once about it. But they would ride the calves, and they had judges, all sorts of things. Everybody had a great time. A lot of the kids in the whole neighborhood, you didn’t have to invite anybody, everybody just came. I guess I went down there and sat on the fence and watched one time. It was all kind of hilarious, you know. It was fun. But they also, the boys had to work out at the farm. They didn’t have all this much time to play every day—as they got older.

JF: I don’t imagine they would have much time.
EU: Well, when they were, you know, ten, eleven, and twelve. But when they got much older then they worked out at the farm.

JF: Did the girls have equivalent types of games?

EU: No.

JF: What did the girls do for fun when they weren’t helping?

EU: We visited back and forth, took walks. Used to go up to the drugstore, for a nickel you could get a Coke and see all your friends. There were always parties and dances and stuff like that.

JF: Were these dances—you mentioned dances yesterday—were they organized by the Church or by the community?

EU: Both. Well, not the community, the school. We had not only just the proms, but lots of times after the basketball game we had a dance. We all loved to dance, and we had real music, a dance orchestra. None of this date business, and everybody has to dance with who brung ‘em. We’d go and everybody would dance and we had….

JF: The boys enjoyed it as much as the girls?

EU: Oh, there’s always more girls than boys, but sure.

JF: The music. It sounds like music was a big part of your lives. Was that the community or your mother’s influence?

EU: There again, it was the Church and the school. As I said, one of the things that the Church was very strong on was education. In all these little communities that were started, you also had schools. And you’d use the church building as the schoolhouse, of course. The Church would send down, usually, somebody to be in charge, an educator—unless there was somebody equally qualified in the town. And then you used a lot of the local teachers that were qualified. So I think we had a good education. But then we also had music teachers—not so much in grade school, but in high school. My music teacher—and he also taught Spanish—was more into bands than orchestras. But then Mrs. Patterson, who followed him, did choruses, she did orchestras, she did all sorts of things. And every year in Flagstaff, the college, they would have a contest, and we would go—the band and the chorus, and scholastic things. We’d do pretty well.

JF: What instrument did you play?

EU: I played clarinet.

JF: And Morris played trumpet. What did Stewart play?
EU: He didn’t play.

JF: And Inez?

EU: Well, she played the piano, and she was with the chorus and stuff like that, but she wasn’t in the band. Eloise followed me in the band. Burr didn’t play in the band.

JF: What did Eloise play?

EU: My clarinet. (chuckles)

JF: Your mother, Louise, I gather really loved to sing, and loved music, and even did plays.

EU: Yes. With the Church, as I say, you had the young men’s activities, and you had the young women’s, but you did things together all the time. So she was very involved in that most of the time. She put on Easter pageants, and we went out by the side of the reservoir one time and had one, and the sun came up. Oh, it was very exciting!

JF: That must be where Kate—Kate [Udall] might have inherited that.

EU: Well, I hadn’t thought of that—might be. And then at Christmastime she’d always put on a pageant, and everybody’d take part. And then a time or two in the summer, just before the war, and there wasn’t too much going on, she put on a play or two. One time some of the guys that used to love being in her plays, they came and said, “We don’t know about the future with all this war and stuff. Let’s do one more play.” So they did. And the plays, I’m not quite sure where she got them, but they were all kind of comedy things. But the pageant, she’d write herself, and I’ve got copies of some of them in there. Yes, she was very active in the young people’s activities.

JF: When did she have time, raising all the kids, and the church activities?

EU: Well, like all those pioneer women, there were all these jobs to do, and somehow you did ‘em. She made us help around the house. I mean, we did all that.

JF: What chores did the girls have?

EU: As we got older, as there were more of us, in the winter, because you had to heat the wash water outside, and wring it out—you didn’t have any of this electricity stuff—she would have—there were poor widow women that were doing laundry and stuff. And so they would do our laundry in the wintertime. We’d have to do it in the summer.

JF: You say “the poor widow women.” Were those Mormon widows?
EU: Yes. It was like a lot of these places—there was not much chance to earn money. They wouldn’t do it a lot, but there was this one woman that would do our laundry. Mother would take it to her, and she would bring it back. But then, as I say, in the summertime, us girls had to do it. And of course we had to do the mopping and the sweeping and whatever needed to be done. She sewed a lot. She made a lot of our clothes, she was very good. And she taught us to sew. Some were better than others. (chuckles) I mean, not make a whole dress, but you were always having to pick out the seams and stuff like that.

JF: Mending.

EU: Yes. Eloise and Inez each took piano lessons. I started, but I was lazy and wouldn’t practice, so they decided there’s no point in me doing it. Then she also, as Burr got into school and everything, she went up to the courthouse. Dad had, on the side, he had the county abstract company.

JF: What was that?

EU: Well, it’s title search. They call them title companies now.

JF: And what was the name of it?

EU: I don’t think we had a name. I think it was just “them.” [Apache Abstract Company]

JF: I ran into something on that. I guess it was in your timeline, and I wasn’t even aware of it. That was your father and your mother?

EU: Well, if somebody came in with a request to have a title search, they would do it. It wasn’t as though they set up office and had business and the time. She’d do a lot of it. We’d all go up and compare. She would type it out, the deeds and everything, out of the records, and then we would have to go and compare back to be sure. The judge wouldn’t sign anything unless we’d compared everything. And so she liked doing that sort of thing. She taught herself how to type. Well, anyway, that’s the way it was.

JF: The boys’ chores were primarily on the farm?

EU: Well, around the house, any house that depends on wood, the job is to keep the wood box full. And woe unto you, if you didn’t. But if you came home, and the fire was almost out, and there wasn’t anything in the wood box, you went down. I’ve chopped. We all have. I mean, you gotta keep the fire going. And Dad would do his part too. He’d always get wood that was sawed so we could split it—well, the kitchen stuff. But they did milking. Now, when the judge was in town, he did all the milking when we were kids. But Inez’s friend, she had two brothers, but somehow it was her job to milk. So she taught Inez how, and Inez would help her every night. They had quite a few cows. So Inez was pretty good. It got so, when the judge would be gone, she would milk
our cow. And I decided I’m not playing that game. (laughter) So she had to wait ‘til Stewart got old enough. I mean, if the judge was home, he always did it. And then there were neighbors, just in case. But anyway, once the boys got old enough, they milked the cows, they slopped the hogs, they chopped the wood. We had a garden in the summer. I don’t think it was by the house. I don’t remember, I think Dad had seen that it got in and irrigated it, but I don’t think we spent too much time pulling weeds or anything.

JF: Was the garden tended primarily by the women, or by the men?

EU: Well, the men would get the whole thing set up, and water—you always had to be sure about the water. We grew corn. We lived on corn all summer.

JF: Was the farm then primarily for your personal consumption?

EU: No, the farm was not for food. The farm was for alfalfa for the animals.

JF: For your animals, primarily, or also….

EU: Well, we grew enough for our animals. We had two horses and a cow. And I don’t think Dad ever sold any. He may have given some to the poor and the needy. But a lot of our uncles, some of them, they raised enough and sold it over at Gallup.

JF: But your father had a salaried job, which probably most didn’t have.

EU: Yes.

JF: So his farm was primarily….

EU: Well, it was good for his boys.

JF: It seems to me someplace I read where Mo indicated that he thought his dad kept the farm to keep the boys busy.

EU: Yes.

JF: Do you think that was….

EU: Well, we needed the hay. I mean, why buy hay? He would supervise it. He’d take them out and get them started for the day and all that sort of stuff. You had to clean out the ditches and the weeds and everything, clean out the ditches in the spring once the water came. You didn’t have to sow alfalfa every year, I don’t think. I think it came up. But if you did, you had to plow and harrow and all that stuff. But then in the summer you had to go out and weed and water. I don’t know what-all they did. But then we didn’t—I said we didn’t have electricity or any motor anything. Eventually, just before the war, they got a stationary baler. You’d have to get the hay on the wagons and bring it over to
the baler and stuff it in. The whole town would get involved in baling. During the war, Burr got stuck with most of it.

JF: That’s what I remember. I gather that’s what caused his back injury.

EU: Nah!

JF: No?

EU: Football.

JF: Oh-ho! Okay. (laughs)

EU: Before the baler, they would load up the hay on the wagons and bring it in and pitch it into the barn.

JF: Really physical work.

EU: Sure!

JF: Were there pranks, mischief? Did anybody ever get in trouble?

EU: Us girls didn’t, but the boys, they acted up a little. There wasn’t too much activity that you could be too bad about, but yes. Morris has told it all, so I don’t need to tell it.

JF: What’s the origin of Morris’ name, do you know? I know the King part. Was he named after anyone?

EU: No.

JF: I wondered about that.

EU: Burr was. I mean, the King, I guess they liked it. Stewart, of course, is Stewart Lee. The only thing he’s missing is Hamblin, because he’s got the four names. And there was a cattleman friend of Dad’s named Burr Porter. Burr’s name is David Burr. But anyway, I think Burr Porter gave Burr a calf when he was born. Dad named him for him. And Inez is named for my Grandmother Lee. I asked mother once where my name came from, and she said when she was pregnant she was reading a very nice story, a novel, and the heroine’s name was Elma. And when Eloise was born, they were debating whether to name her Ella, after Grandma, [or] Louise after Mother, and Aunt Lela said, “Let’s name here Eloise.”

JF: Oh! Okay. I would never have thought about that. As to mischief, Burr mentioned a time when he was about eight, that he just decided he was going to poke Eloise’s eye out.
EU: Well, I wasn’t there, I didn’t get involved in that, so I don’t really know. I know they had a tussle with the ax down in the woodpile one time, and I think she got cut.

JF: He mentioned something about her axing his two feet, or something.

EU: Well, I don’t know what happened. See, there came a point where four of us had gone, and they were the two that were still home.

JF: When you were in high school, that would have been probably Inez, Stewart, and you—were you all in high school about the same time?

EU: Inez was three years ahead of me, because she skipped a grade. And Stewart probably was a freshman when I was a senior. But we didn’t, you know, interact much. Stewart and I really became good friends after that. When he went on his mission, I wrote to him all the time. We became very close friends after that—but not so much growing up.

JF: So there was probably—if you were spaced like that, you didn’t have the sibling rivalry? You and Inez were valedictorians. There was no sibling rivalry in terms of the boys?

EU: Oh, no. We didn’t care much about grades. Inez got straight “A’s” all the time. And all I cared about was keeping ahead of everybody else. But I was not all straight “A’s” like she was. I was not valedictorian from high school, because a new guy came in from Eager, which is part of the same school system, and he had straight “A’s,” and the principal gave him the honor instead of me, because I didn’t care. I think Eloise was, too. Stewart was the class grumbler.

JF: Class grumbler?

EU: In class, in grade school, Mr. Gibbons, he was quite a great teacher and a lot of fun, and anyway he decided Stewart would be the class grumbler.

JF: What is the class grumbler?

EU: Well, it was only that one year. He kind of grumbled about some of the things. It was kind of a funny thing—you know, some of the things that had gone on in the school. Of course Morris did all right. I don’t think Burr cared much about grades. I mean, he was smart enough, but I don’t think he worked toward being Number One.

JF: Morris seemed like kind of a standout in high school. He was valedictorian, he was class president, he was quarterback, etc. But was he really any more of a standout than the rest of you?

EU: No, nobody was. See, the thing is you can’t play football, and you can’t play in the band, and you can’t do all these things all by yourself. Everybody’s in there. And he
was good, and he was fun, and he was active. I mean, he kept everything going. But I
don’t think he was the great hero. And when Stewart went in the cabinet, some of
Mother’s relatives, or somebody, said, “Well, you know, when did you realize what a
wonderful, outstanding son you had?” And she said, “He isn’t!”

JF: (laughs) Well, it sounds to me from my research that you were all pretty
outstanding.

EU: Well, we never considered it.

JF: What were your family dinners like, when you all sat around the table at night?

EU: We didn’t sit around the table at night. We had dinner at noon.

JF: Did you talk politics then?

EU: Well, as we got older, more so. But we talked about the events—you know,
everything that was going on in the town. I don’t know, Dad—we had an hour from
school, for lunch.

JF: And that was your primary meal of the day?

EU: Yes, because we had wood to cook with. Mother did all this in the kitchen in the
morning. And most of the people around town, you had dinner at noon, and then you
had—she’d let the fire go out in the kitchen, and we’d be in the living room, by the
fireplace, in the evenings and stuff. Dad didn’t always get home on time, but because we
had to get back to school, we went ahead without him. You know, on Sundays,
weekends, and stuff like that. It wasn’t every day we had these…. And as we got older,
why, sure, we had all sorts of conversations.

JF: What was your meal in the evening?

EU: Well, we’d have bread and milk, or toasted cheese, or cereal, or cold meat.

JF: What did you primarily eat for breakfast?

EU: Mush!

JF: Cornmeal? Cornmeal mush?

EU: Oh, there was all sorts of mush—mushes. There was Cream of Wheat, and there
was some kind of bran. I don’t remember the names. But I think every kid in town, you
had a hot cereal for breakfast. We all had our own milk and cream and all that stuff. And
it was a great breakfast, because you didn’t get hungry. And sometimes we’d have toast,
but basically we’d have mush, oatmeal, all those things. And one time—see, as we got
older, Mother would sometimes go on little trips with Dad. I was in high school, and she
went, and I was in charge. And Inez had gone off to college. I’d have to get up and make a fire and fix breakfast and get the kids off. But then I think our neighbor, Sister Richey, she’d come over and fix dinner for us. But anyway, sometimes I didn’t get up in time and didn’t want to make the fire—especially if it was kind of summer. So they’d have to have—we didn’t have too much cold cereal, we didn’t hear much about it. You’d have to have toast and a glass of milk, or something like that. When Mom and Dad finally got back, the car drove up, and they didn’t even come to a stop, ‘til Burr was out the door, yellin’, “Elma didn’t make me any mush!” (laughter) So he ratted on me.

JF: He mentioned in his oral history that you served as kind of a surrogate mother for him.

EU: Well, I never thought of myself as the mother, but I was the right age to be the babysitter. I was eleven. And Inez could go to the dances and things, but I stayed home with Burr. Yeah, I was his babysitter. We got along fine.

JF: He wasn’t a tough baby to sit?

EU: Nah.

JF: Around 1934, your uncle, Rex Lee, was killed in a hunting accident. That was your mother’s brother?

EU: Yes.

JF: What happened with that?

EU: It’s too long a story. Rex graduated from law school in Tucson in the depths of the Depression, and there were no jobs or anything. But he came up at Dad’s invitation and worked with Dad while Dad was going to run for judge. He was there, and he was living with us.

JF: He worked as a lawyer with your dad?

EU: Yes. And so when Dad when on the court, why then Rex took over the practice. And he’d been married before, and his wife had TB, had died. But anyway, he was married.

JF: This was a second marriage?

EU: Yes. And she was pregnant with Rex.

JF: Rex, Jr.?

EU: Yes. The Whitings—Mabel was a Whiting—every year all the men went on a hunting trip up to the Kaibab.
JF: Is that up in the Greer area?

EU: Oh, no, that’s Arizona/Utah, north of the Grand Canyon. And Rex was a hunter. He used to go out—we all did—and shoot jackrabbits and all sorts of things, bottles, beer cans. So they went, and anyway…. It was not just them—there were about twenty people or more. One of the men—Rex was out hunting, he could hardly wait to get out, soon as they got there. And he was shot by one of the men who said he thought he was a deer. He saw the thing move. But he didn’t come back and report it to the group, so for two days they had to look for him and found him. It kind of tore the town apart. Here was Mabel, pregnant. They eventually had a trial in Flagstaff, but they had no real good motive. Anyway, it was….

JF: Who presided over the trial?

EU: Judge Harrison, Flagstaff. Flagstaff was the county that it happened in.

JF: Now, Rex and his wife weren’t living with you at that time?

EU: Oh, no, they had their own place.

JF: That must have been pretty traumatic for you all.

EU: Well, every man in town was on that—I mean, the family. Dad was holding court in Prescott and all of Mabel’s men were gone, they were on this hunt way the hell and gone up in Kaibab. There was a CCC [Civilian Conservation Corps] camp up there, but I mean there wasn’t any communication. In those days, it’s interesting how things were. Dad was holding court in Prescott, and the operator knew that he was there, and the message from Mabel’s father, a telegram, went through Prescott on the way to St. Johns. And she called Dad and told him and read it to him. He called Mother. I was standing there by her. We had the telephone on the wall, and she just kept saying, “Oh Levi, oh Levi.” Anyway, she kind of slumped, and then she turned to me and she said, “Rex has been killed, and we have to go tell Mabel.”

JF: Oh!

EU: Anyway, we went over there, and Mabel was six month’s pregnant, and she was lying there on the couch. We walked in and she looked up. “Mother,” she said, “there’s something wrong, isn’t there?” Mother said, “Yes.” She said, “Is it about Rex?” Mother said, “Yes.” She said, “Was he hurt?” And mother didn’t say anything. She said, “Is he dead?” Mother said, “Yes.” Then they sent for Grandma Whiting and Mother told me to go up to the telephone office and get the telegram. Mrs. Cowley was not a very good typist, and I was better than she was, so I typed the final thing. It was from E.I. to Dad saying, “Rex—accidentally—killed instantly. Will be home tonight.”

JF: Wow. What a tough thing to go through.
EU: Yes.

JF: In a small community in those days, I would imagine that death was dealt with more directly than it is now. Were kids shielded from it?

EU: Oh, no, you were all very much part of it. We didn’t have any undertaker, we didn’t have anything. The Relief Society women took care of preparing the bodies. The carpenter made the coffin. Of course, when they brought Rex, he’d been taken care of in Flagstaff or somewhere. So if you heard of somebody’s death and you came to see what you could do, you got a shovel and were told to go out to the cemetery and help dig the grave. That wasn’t always easy, in that dirt out there. No, the whole town mourned. We were all involved.

JF: What a tragedy for a small community.

EU: Yes.

JF: Did your brothers hunt? Did the girls hunt, for that matter?

EU: No. We used to, in the summer, the girls and boys—some of them were cowboys—we’d go up in the mountains near Greer and camp out a day or two. The boys would do the cooking, fortunately. They were great cooks; bring all the equipment. Stewart went hunting with Rex. They didn’t go deer hunting, but they went—well, not only hunting, more fishing. Rex was a great outdoorsman, and they’d go up around Greer and fish. Stewart went with him more than Morris did. That was when he was living with us. But Virgil, that I dated—who was Mabel’s brother—he had a .22 all the time and taught me to shoot, and we’d go out after prairie dogs and jackrabbits. They were a menace. And whiskey bottles. They’d be dumped out there, and we’d line them up. I got pretty good.

JF: Not a bad skill to know in those days, anyway.

EU: Well, I mean, we didn’t have any crimes with guns or anything. With Westerners, a gun was kind of in the house.

JF: You mentioned dating. In high school was dating a common thing?

EU: Sure. But not everybody. I mean, you didn’t have to date to go to all these things. Not everybody dated, but yes.

JF: The high school was not segregated, am I correct about that?

EU: It was never segregated. The Mexicans, on their side of town, had a grade school, and it was in Spanish. And we had a grade school. But there was one high school. Not many of the Mexicans came to high school, but four or five would in each class. I mean, that’s what there was in my class.
JF: How large was your class?

EU: Twenty-five. We had about a little over a hundred students all together.

JF: The whole school?

EU: Yes. The way I look at the whole thing, when the generations, when David King came there, and the Mexicans were running things, and it was very unfriendly and all this. After a time, it kind of—they sort of tolerated each other, but there wasn’t any fuss or anger or anything, but it was kind of—you know, “You do it your way, and we’ll do it ours, on our side of town.” But by my father’s generation, they were kind of talking a little—the kids. They played over on their side, but you never had good friends or anything out of these Mexicans, but at least you kind of laughed and talked to them. They played—in the high school, some of them were very good athletes—they played basketball together and stuff like that. And we would dance with them—not a lot, but there was one, Conce, he was a great basketball player and a great dancer. But they dated their own, and we did too.

JF: So dating…. You wouldn’t have dated a Mexican.

EU: No, no. Not in my generation, but now the next generation, they have.

JF: How about by Burr’s time?

EU: No, not so much in his time. I mean, they were going to school together and knew each other, but I’m talking about the next generation. Not in a great number, but I mean, there are some, and it works very well.

JF: And what would dating consist of—primarily going to the dances?

EU: Oh, you’d go out to the cemetery and neck. And parties. Go to the movies. Well, we didn’t have movies ‘til—we had the old silent thing, and then that burned up. We didn’t have movies again until I was just getting out of high school. But we’d go on Sunday, with good luck, you’d be good and go to church in the morning, and then you could get your dad’s car and go to Holbrook for the movie. When that burned down, I guess we went to Winslow, or to Gallup.

JF: Theaters had bad luck around there.

EU: Yes. But in the summers, particularly, we’d have a lot of spontaneous parties out in the hills—bonfires.

JF: And if someone got their parents’ car, they’d fill it up with people?

EU: Well, your own family.
JF: You mentioned going to church first. When Mo was twelve years old -- as I understand it, twelve is sort of the coming of age for boys in St. Johns?
EU: Yes.

JF: I understand when he was twelve, which would have been about 1934, I guess, that he stopped going to church.

EU: Well, I don’t remember that particular period. It was in that teenage bit where Stewart and Morris didn’t continue too much. They weren’t too active. They weren’t anti or anything—they just didn’t want to go. And they weren’t the only ones. There were some that walked out—some of the boys around town didn’t go.

JF: Was that embarrassing for your parents who were so active in the Church?

EU: No. We knew where they stood, we knew what they wanted, but they weren’t going to scream and yell. They would have been very pleased, and I think Mother tried extra hard sometimes, to have their clothes all ready, and “C’mon, let’s go.” But she wasn’t about to let it break up the relationship or anything and make it a sin to not go. It was accepted.

JF: Burr mentioned something about he thought that Mo had once been kicked out of Sunday school.

EU: It was Seminary.

JF: It was Seminary? Because he couldn’t really remember what it was. Do you know what he was kicked out for?

EU: Well, he was not exactly an iconoclast, but he was pretty flip sometimes. I don’t remember the exact incident. He wasn’t the only one. A lot of those guys were, you know, teenagers acting up.

JF: Rebelling, probably, to some extent.

EU: Yes. But it was a verbal thing—the teacher didn’t like what he said.

JF: And again, they used to play basketball in front of your house, which was close enough to the church to hear them?

EU: Well, the church—on the main street there was the Elm Hotel, and the high school was just across the street from it. The church was here. And then there was a football field, and then we were across from the football field. So they’d play basketball after school in the high school. And then we had—it wasn’t full-length or anything—but we had two baskets against cottonwood trees, and so everybody’d come over there, a lot of
the guys, and they’d keep on playing. For Christmas, Stewart and Morris, they all got a basketball and a football. They were the community—everybody came and played.

JF: They were the playing field, huh?

EU: They were good. Instead of just practicing at school, they practiced all the time. And I guess kids do that now, too.

JF: Burr mentioned that they used to play basketball during church, until your mother finally came out and said—or maybe it was during Sunday school—and apparently everybody could hear it, and she asked them to please move the game.

EU: I don’t remember that. I could have been gone by then.

JF: Were you or she ever aware of the poker games they apparently played during church?

EU: Well, they did some, but it wasn’t as though it was every Sunday or every week, or anything like that. She may have been. I’m sure I heard all about it, but I didn’t much care.

JF: In 1937, your Grandmother Ella passed away—I gather fairly suddenly.

EU: I wasn’t there.

JF: Do you know what she died of?

EU: Well, old age and a heart attack, I think. She wasn’t really sick very long, but she was kind of deteriorating, and she was in her eighties.

JF: Oh, was she? Okay.

EU: She was eighty-four, I guess.

JF: What did your grandfather do after that?

EU: He only lived about a year. He died in ’38. His daughter, Aunt Erma, was living in Holbrook, and she came up and lived with him and took care of him.

JF: And did he die primarily of old age?

EU: Yes.

JF: So he stayed in the house that he was in?

EU: Oh, yes.
JF: I would imagine—he was such a huge community leader, that I would imagine that his death would have been a major community event.

EU: Well, it was quite a funeral, yes. I was there then, when he died. But I think—well, when you’ve lived that long, there’s not a lot of sadness in the loss and everything. I mean, it’s kind of a—they had a good life, and we’ll miss them, but, you know. And he’d kind of phased-out anyway. But he used to still walk out to the farm all the time, if he could.